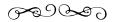
JEANNE WAGNER

Gabriel and the Virgin: Fra Angelico's Annunciation

I see they're made for each other though he's only a stand-in for God a Captain Smith, or a Cyrano. They could be sister and brother, the way their arms fold over their breasts in secret semaphore; their slippered feet peeking out from under their robes; twin coils of hair framing their faces. The only difference is that feathered artifice between his shoulder blades. stylish and smooth as sateen. I want to stroke it, like the soft wings of the hens that follow me in the yard at home, pecking the dirt, clucking and boasting egg every noon. I knew I'd never be as pure as these two, angel and virgin, because once I heard the shuddering of an owl's wings as it landed nearby, concussing the air, the cry of fear as the hawk swooped down, and, with two sharp talons, embraced the vole.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeanne Wagner is the author of *The Zen Piano Mover* (NFSPS Press 2004), *In the Body of Our Lives* (Sixteen Rivers Press 2011), and *The Genesis Machine* (Sow's Ear Press 2017). Her poetry has also appeared in *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Shenandoah*, and *The Southern Review*. She serves on the board of Sixteen Rivers Press and is a former editor of *California Quarterly*. A retired accountant, she lives in Kensington, California. She can be found online at www.sixteenrivers.org/authors/jeanne-wagner.

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